The new Marina shows that 1963 is a long time ago

By Larry Swindell 12/13/77
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NEW YORK—America and the rest of the world became aware of her almost 14 years ago. At first, people regarded her with curiosity and vague contempt, then with deepening sympathy and compassion.

She was Marina Oswald then—a 22-year-old with two small children, pathetically frightened and unable to understand English. She had been rudely shoved into the spotlight after her husband, who had been accused of murdering the President of the United States, was himself slain in a presumed act of vengeance.

Yesterday, Marina Oswald Porter emerged from a long seclusion to disarm reporters with her poise, her forthright response to often sticky questions, and her charmingly accented yet assured command of the English language.

The occasion was a press conference arranged by Harper & Row, publishers of Priscilla Johnson McMillan's "Marina and Lee," just off the press. In the stately Harper & Row chambers on East 53d Street, Mrs. Porter held court for about 100 reporters, photographers and other oglers.

The Marina they saw was a distinctly pretty, 36-year-old woman with luminous blue eyes and a wash-and-wear coiffure emphasizing dark blonde bangs, giving her a gamin aura. Strikingly trim, she wore a simple but smart beige pantsuit.

Marina was accompanied by her literary catalyst, Priscilla McMillan, whose book essentially records Marina's own outpourings, stressing her relationship and turbulent marriage with Lee Harvey Oswald in the Soviet Union and then Texas.

Mrs. McMillan spent three months with Marina Oswald not long after the assassinations, and they pursued a dialogue marathon addressed to the paramount question: Why?

Yet Marina neither sought nor needed Priscilla McMillan's assistance to convey her opinions on the Kennedy assassination.

She is convinced that her first husband killed John F. Kennedy and with undiminished conviction says, "I believe that Lee acted alone."

The press conference began awkwardly, as most questions were about the Oswalds' sex life — which, however, is dealt with candor in the book. (She says Lee was a good and gentle lover.)

Marina seemed relieved when asked to characterize Lee Harvey Oswald, and her answers were more forceful.

"Ironically," she said, "President Kennedy was a man he respected and admired. In Russia, he bragged about the handsome young President, and perhaps he became jealous of him. But I never understood the things he did, and he was so secretive, I could never find things out.

"I know he was very confused between right and wrong," she said, "but there was no way I could penetrate him."

So why did she marry him?

"When I met him," she said, "he was lonely and withdrawn, and I was sympathetic to him, in a strange country. But I also thought he had good qualities, and although we had difficulty in our marriage, I have happy memories of him. I seem to remember only the good things, and my mind blocks out the bad."

When the possibility of mental illness was suggested, Marina said "I do not believe that anyone in his right mind could kill someone he admired."

She has made a life for herself in Richardson, Tex., a suburb of Dallas. She married Kenneth Porter in 1965, and although they were divorced three years ago, they are again living together. She describes Porter as a good father to the Oswald children, now 15 and 14, and the Porters also have an 11-year-old son.

She has not read any other books about the Kennedy assassination, saying "I do not approve of violence. I know that sounds strange, but it's true."